

# Did You Remember to DID?

*Art Greenlee*



**C**ongratulations! You have just become a new program manager! The outgoing program manager, however, has implied the program you just inherited seems to lack strong communication and essential coordination among its integrated product teams, and team members are over-protecting information between government and contractor teams. No one wants to share key data. Everybody is too guarded. To make matters worse, certain

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IPTs are surprised that leadership has not implemented some key information-dissemination initiatives that are so essential to the upcoming engineering, manufacturing, and development phase. After reflecting on those apparent issues, you wonder what action you need to take first. You and your team suspect your success will be invariably shaped by your initial decisions.

With respect to individual or organizational performance, there is considerable literature written on the importance of having the right focus and the right planning, and, of course, rightly executing the plan. The experts say it should all be based on "defined performance measures." And whether leading a team, your program, or an organization, there are three critical actions to keep in mind: carefully develop the needed information, share it with all who need to know, and codify it for future reference. In other words, Define, Inform, and Document (DID).

## **Successful Performance Strategy**

In her *Performance Consulting Field Book* (2007), Judith Hale identifies groups of interventions that consultants need to have at their disposal to improve performance at individual, team/group, or organizational levels. She goes on to say that information-focused interventions represent the first and most important of the performance strategy groups. Within the group are three intervention approaches: define, inform, and document. Basing her reasoning on her more than 25 years of corporate and government consulting experience, Hale considers those important because:

- They are frequently the only thing you may need to do right to improve performance.
- They support most, if not all, other recommendations for improvement.
- If not done right or overlooked, it will greatly reduce the program effectiveness and lead to the possible failure of other performance strategies.

So, in your program planning and execution phase, did you DID? If you did not, a brief coverage of each of the overlapping strategies will serve as a reminder, especially as they relate to defense acquisition program management practices. Knowing how to apply the strategies could be just what's needed to enable more successful outcomes.

### **Define**

The first component imperative—define—has been highlighted by many problem-solving models. It's usually stated in a simple and straightforward way: "Did you define the problem and search for causal factors?" Subsequent objectives and alternative approaches to solving the problem should be carefully developed and clearly articulated as well. In the Defense Acquisition Management System framework, a validated and approved initial capabilities document defines the required need, problem, or gap to be met. As a part of the pre-acquisition activities, all planning efforts focus on defining system and program goals, requirements, and sub-

sequent resources to execute the program. A well-defined analysis of alternatives, technology development strategy, component cost estimate, and even draft capabilities development document in place at Milestone A will facilitate success through the technology development phase. Risk reduction and technology maturity activities such as competitive prototyping are enhanced by successful definition of performance requirements and technical management strategies, including test, logistics, manufacturing, and other technical strategies. Within the program, a well-defined organization structure with well-defined teams with well-defined roles and responsibilities are key enablers to successful program execution among government and contractor teams. As long as each IPT chief gives team members a defined role (or roles) and clear direction and seeks buy in by the team members, the IPT will most likely be a strong and focused team.

Spending the right attention and the right amount of time on defining upfront can produce huge dividends. For example:

- Defining strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats (also known as a SWOT analysis) is a very useful method in identifying potential issues, hidden agendas, and competing egos.
- Defining a risk management approach during pre-systems acquisition activities facilitates risk planning, identification, analysis, and mitigation approaches to combat cost, schedule, and performance hurdles.

A well-defined acquisition strategy better secures program approval at Milestone B because all implementation options are weighed against known risks and mitigation strategies are defined to ultimately meet the user's warfighter capability (defined in the capability development document) in a timely and affordable manner.

The acquisition strategy also ensures technical and business strategies are defined and integrated into one overarching approach to achieve objective program goals. A few examples of strategies:

- Contracting approaches must be well-defined to help contractors contain cost and reduce risk throughout the design, development, demonstration, delivery, and deployment of capability to the end user, including the disposal of a system at the end of its useful life.
- Systems engineering plans must define the overall technical management approach for the program and ensure key processes—such as test, logistics, and manufacturing—are defined and integrated to provide sustained combat capability.
- Cost, schedule, and performance goals must be defined in an acquisition program baseline.
- All essential documentation must be defined, integrated, and prepared for Milestone B, which itself defines and certifies the program of record. Exit criteria are established for the next phase and are defined and documented in the acquisition decision memorandum.

With all the program planning and organization defined, how do you communicate your plan of attack to your team(s) to execute program priorities? A comprehensive communications plan uses what's been defined and informs (the second key component to DID) government and contractor teams of the essential program execution strategies.

## Inform

Inform means communicating to internal and external stakeholders what was defined, expected, discovered, concluded, or changed. While defining sets the stage, establishes the direction, and facilitates buy in, informing gets the word out. Well-planned information tools provide all the necessary guidance to conduct the overall job. They also incorporate a feedback mechanism in order to measure how tasks were performed per the defined plan and can later accommodate for adjustments. Knowing expectations greatly contributes to a satisfied, productive program management team. It is not enough to have all the planning and plans in place, however. Information performance strategies ensure the people who need to know know, and such strategies survive regardless of information or people changes.

Information dissemination can be accomplished by either written or oral communication. The challenge is when and how to use written or oral communication to get the word out to facilitate successful program execution. Activities like morning stand-up meetings—a best practice to communicate daily priorities—usually take no more than 15 minutes, and such meetings require all attendees to stand up and brief the priorities for the day. Stand-ups promote communication within and among IPTs. Other simple information tools, such as meeting agendas and minutes with action items, apprise participants and leadership of key decisions and next steps. Quad charts, dashboards, home pages, portal sites, internal newsletters, and “war rooms” are all methods of getting the information to the right people at the right time for the right purpose in order to gain program traction and ultimately achieve objective results.

Telepresence, video teleconferencing, GoToMeeting® gatherings, and other Web-based tools such as podcasts, portals, and microblogging sites inform decision makers and team members in real time about crucial recommendations/decisions so they stay informed. Informing all stake-

holders across and up the acquisition chain of command is imperative during a program's life cycle. Tradeoff decisions are constantly assessed to ensure a design is affordable, verifiable, supportable, and producible. Consequently, program personnel need to be fully engaged to manage risks and ensure the program/system is meeting its goals. On-going communication and knowledge sharing must go on between and among government and contractor teams from beginning to end and within each life cycle phase.

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Information strategies also need to be adjusted when information changes, people change, or poor performance starts to surface. Feedback tools, like climate surveys, provide organizations with a pulse of the organization, ensuring communication and knowledge-sharing enablers are periodically assessed, and feedback tools that are implemented can contribute to successful program execution and outcomes.

## Document

Document, the final component of DID, captures and preserves key program information/documentation. Documenting key decisions, recommendations, and direction helps frame, organize, control, and guide future action. “No job is done until the paperwork is complete” is a common phrase that cannot be emphasized enough by leadership. History has shown that it is vitally important to capture critical program information and the subsequent actions taken. From documenting initial technical and business processes to capturing helpful lessons learned and best practices, collecting and documenting information must be useful and purposeful.

Every organization should consider how to best codify and learn from program decisions and subsequent actions. No one appreciates having to reinvent the wheel, relearn someone else's past failures, or unnecessarily retrace what's already taken place unless a root cause analysis is required. Organizations can be well-served by establishing accessible knowledge management systems for their respective workforces for reference and guidance as they plan and execute their responsibilities. For example, policy documents, directives, operating instructions, flow charts, and other job aids should be appropriately documented and available for all to retrieve. Information aids such as help screens and other useful navigation and training features have proved to lessen the burden of having to painfully learn another new system.

Well-established program documentation methods that capture decisions, execution actions, and program baselines help convey the progress. For example, at each milestone review, an acquisition decision memorandum documents the program's authority to proceed or not and documents key exit criteria that are the key "gates of success" programs must accomplish prior to the next major review/milestone. Situation reports and weekly activity reports note what significant events/decisions took place on a program. They also inform key stakeholders/advocates and maintain a documented historical account.

Admittedly, we learn lessons more than once. Given the sense of urgency in the acquisition field, there is a natural tendency to go onto the next action without taking time to reflect and learn from past experiences. Organizations that have become learning organizations now promote learning libraries that document individual, team, or organizational experiences. Capturing what worked, what didn't, and what needs to happen next time are all relevant when trying to document "what did I/we learn from this event/decision?" Communities of practice can be an invaluable way to broadcast best practices and lessons learned. Whether it is sharing information about a technical event such as a developmental or operational test or business function such as cost estimating, source selection, or earned value management, what was learned must be carefully documented. If we don't document what we've done and learned, then we are still just practicing.

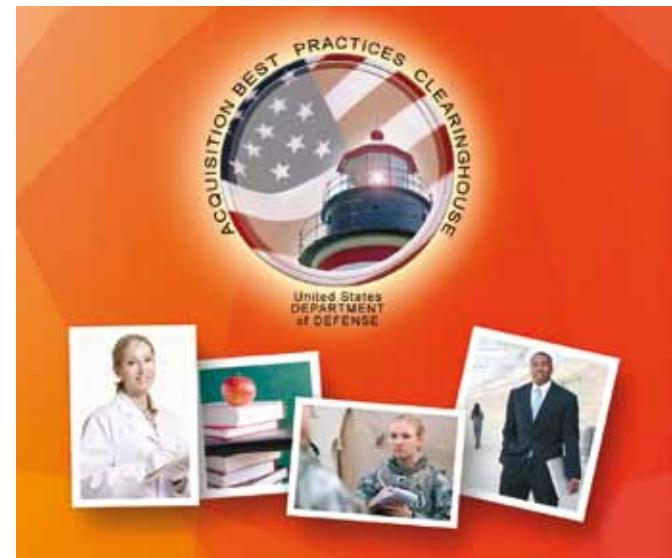
A disciplined documentation approach also gives us an opportunity to reward our people for their exceptional job performance. Documenting accomplishments make end-of-year reporting or periodic award submittals less of a chore and more of a justifiable result where we can recognize our people for the great work they've done.

### **Did You DID?**

If you haven't DID, you may want to consider Judith Hale's information-focused strategy, which focuses on boosting the three major communication components of define, inform, and document. If you do, both you and your organization are bound to reap the benefits. Your plans will start to crystallize, your people will start to visualize, and your programs will start to energize. More important, the warfighters will be the beneficiaries of more cost-effective and more robust weapon systems that find their way into combat operations and/or support of combat operations. And that's what matter most.

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## **DoD Acquisition Best Practices Clearinghouse (BPCh)**

A single, authoritative source of useful, validated, actionable practice information

### **Do these issues sound familiar?**

- There are many practice lists to choose from but no guidance for selecting specific practices
- "Proof of practice" effectiveness is usually not available
- The connection between practices and specific program risks are undefined
- Success factors for practices are not well documented
- Implementation guidance is often missing
- The cost and timeliness associated with implementing and using the practices are often not specified

### **The BPCh can help by:**

- Serving as the authoritative source for practices in DoD and industry
- Targeting the needs of the software acquisition, software development, systems engineering, program management, and logistics communities
- Connecting communities of practice, centers of excellence, academic and industry sources and practitioners
- Promoting and assisting in the selection, adoption, and effective utilization of best practices and supporting evidence

For more information, visit the BPCh web site at <https://bpch.dau.mil>, or contact:

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